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211332Z Feb 06

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000191

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR OBSERVES FOOD
DISTRIBUTION PROCESS

Summary

1. The Ambassador recently visited a WFP food distribution in rural Zimbabwe. He witnessed the labor-intensive and complicated nature of the distribution process. Community members were involved in almost all aspects of the process, helping to make it transparent, fair, and apolitical.

Background

2. The period from October 2005 to April 2006 is considered the "hunger period" in Zimbabwe, the time after food stocks have been depleted and before the new harvest. This is the time that the World Food Program (WFP) and the Consortium for Southern Africa Food Security Emergency (C-SAFE, an NGO consortium comprised of World Vision, CARE, and Catholic Relief Services) implement their vulnerable group feeding (VGF), a program of large-scale, free food distribution to vulnerable households.

3. Accompanied by USAID and WFP staff, the Ambassador traveled to Mashonaland East Province on February 9th to observe a VGF food distribution in the Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe (UMP) District. The Mashonaland East Province is part of the farming heartland of Zimbabwe, with historically high levels of agricultural production. WFP implemented this distribution with World Vision (WV) as its cooperating partner. Over 5,000 beneficiaries from nearly 1,000 families received food on this day. District-wide in UMP, the WFP is targeting about 63,500 beneficiaries, roughly half of the total population as estimated in the 2002 census. A large number of policemen were present at the distribution site, as well as individuals who WFP staff identified as intelligence agents.

Community Members Heavily Involved in Labor-
Intensive Process

4. Volunteers from the beneficiary community were involved in various ways. Beneficiary selection is an outcome of village consensus on the basis of criteria established by WFP and managed by World Vision. Criteria for beneficiary selection include low harvest, income, and asset ownership, with priority given to those who are also chronically ill, disabled, elderly or orphans. Public and household-level beneficiary verifications by WFP and World Vision serve to refine beneficiary registers and ensure the fairness and transparency of the process. Community members also assist with off-loading food from the trucks and with the initial separation of the items.

15. Before the distribution began, WV employees gave a general explanation of the process to the assembled group. Community members and WV employees then verified the names of the people on the registration lists before the beneficiaries were allowed to take food. The monthly ration per person of 10 kg of cornmeal, .3 kg of oil, and .5 kg. of beans was prominently displayed so that each family would know exactly how much they could expect to receive. Groups of ten households were processed together. They received the food and then the beneficiaries sub-divided the rations equally per household themselves. A scale was provided so that each person could measure the amount of food they had received before leaving the premises. At each stage, WFP and WV employees, as well as community volunteers, were on hand to monitor the distribution and help make the process run smoothly. There were no indications of political interference. Even though the Member of Parliament for the District did arrive during the Ambassador's visit, he made no attempt to make any speeches and his presence was low-key.

16. As with other distribution points, the UMP distribution contained a Help Desk, staffed by community volunteers and World Vision representatives, to enable both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries to register any complaints. WFP reviews any complaints as part of its monitoring process. WFP and WV also conduct post-distribution monitoring, where a sample of households are visited to ascertain the effectiveness of the targeting and beneficiary satisfaction with the registration and distribution process.

Comment

17. The distribution in UMP district was performed in an orderly manner with no signs of political interference. It was evident from this visit that WFP, WV and community members made painstaking efforts to assure that a fair and transparent process was followed. The laborious process is designed to keep the government at bay, closing off any opportunity for political interference. It was also evident from the many policemen and intelligence agents who shadowed the Ambassador during this visit that the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) is nervous about diplomats having contact with its most vulnerable citizens. Past allegations of politicized food distribution by the GOZ, however, highlight the critical importance of continued donor monitoring.
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